DROITWICH CANALS

RESTORATION GUIDE

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1. PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

This guide illustrates the changes that have taken place to the abandoned canals during its recent restoration. It provides a series of photographs taken before during and after the works have been completed. It will serve to highlight the extent of works undertaken by British Waterways, restoration partners and our volunteers.

1.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE CANAL

The Barge and Junction Canals were both abandoned in 1939 through the Droitwich Canals Abandonment Act. Some restoration work has been undertaken to the canal and its structures since 1973 by the Droitwich Canals Trust. The Droitwich Barge Canal was one of Britain's earliest canals. It was built by James Brindley, one of our most famous canal engineers. Opened in 1771, it served Droitwich's salt trade by linking the centre of Droitwich with the navigable River Severn six miles away. Competition from salt production at nearby Stoke Works and from railways led to the construction of the Droitwich Junction Canal. Built in 1854 this was one of the last canals to be built in England, and linked the Barge Canal with the Worcester & Birmingham Canal 1.5 miles away at Hanbury Wharf. The western end of the Junction Canal utilised a 150m length of the River Salwarpe which was canalised to enable navigation.

1.2. RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

Widespread public support for the restoration and recognition of the economic, social and environmental benefits the restoration would bring to Droitwich Spa and the surrounding area led to the formation of the Droitwich Canals Restoration Partnership in July 2001. Wychavon District Council as land owner joined with Worcestershire County Council, British Waterways, The Waterways Trust and the Droitwich Canals Trust to restore the canals as a living, working waterway. The Partnership aims were to create and manage a linear canal park centred on the Droitwich Canals, which will seek to conserve and enhance the natural and built environment and provide a range of informal recreational opportunities.

1.3. FUNDING

The total cost of the restoration is anticipated to be £12.7 million. The partnership has secured funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Advantage West Midlands (AWM), British Waterways, Wychavon District Council and Worcestershire County Council and many others. The Waterways Trust has raised over £500,000 to support the project. British Waterways as lead partner has project managed the delivery of the construction works over recent years.

The partners would like to thank all the funders for making this project happen.

1.4. DELIVERY PARTNERS

The project has been delivered by a range of consultants and contractors who have worked hard to restore the canals to a high standard ensuring the environment and heritage of the canals is enhanced and preserved.

Along with assisting in the delivery of the restoration these contractors and consultants have supported the opening celebrations. The partnership would like to thank them for their on-going support of the restoration.

During the last 3 years of the project the community team facilitated 8 education weeks working with local schools to encourage the use of the canals as an educational resource which can readily be woven into the National Curriculum. Topics covered ranged from life processes through to physical education in the form of a challenging paddle in Katakanues along the summit pound of the Barge Canal. The design and technology work included visits to construction sites to excite the children about major civil engineering projects.

Canal engineers of the future?

Future Olympians?

2.0. LOCK 1 AND THE RIVER SEVERN

- Works undertaken – significant silt removal (up to 3m deep in places) within the lock chamber, both walls rebuild of top 4-8 courses of bricks, re-pointing of 10-12 courses of bricks and reinstatement of sandstone and brick copings to lock edge. New lock gates, sealing ‘quoins’ and associated metalwork, and laying of new brick-paved, gate operating ‘quadrants’.

3.0. LOCK 2

- Perhaps the worst condition of all the locks – lock 2 required significant silt removal within the lock chamber, both walls rebuild of top 12-16 courses of bricks, re-pointing of 10-12 courses of bricks and reinstatement of sandstone and brick copings to lock edge. The farm access bridge was removed and replaced by a small footbridge. A new byewash has also been installed.

4.0. A449 CROSSING

- The tunnel under the A449 was constructed to reconnect the canal under the A449 dual carriageway. Works were within 15m of a Grade 2 listed building.

- This was constructed by Alun Griffiths Contractors.

5.0. LOCK 3

- Works undertaken - minor silt and debris removal, rebuild and re-pointing of top 3-4 courses of brick and reinstatement of brick copings on the north lock wall. New gates, sealing ‘quions’, metalwork and quadrants as per lock 1 description.

6.0. LOCKS 4 AND 5

LOCK 4

LOCK 5

- Works undertaken – Lock 4 - minor silt and debris removal, partial demolition of lock walls, breaking back to original construction to remove poor facing brickwork added in late 1800's/early 1900's. Reinstatement of sandstone and brick copings to lock edges. New gates, sealing 'quoins', metalwork and quadrants as per lock 1 description.
- Lock 5 – minor silt and debris removal, minimal brickwork repairs to chamber, drilling and grouting works undertaken on south wall where a bulge and voids were identified. Removal of old pedestrian access bridge on tail of lock. New gates, sealing 'quoins', metalwork and quadrants as per lock 1 description.

7.0. LOCK 6

- Works undertaken - minor silt and debris removal, brickwork repairs to chamber. Removal of old pedestrian access bridge on tail of lock. Serious leak through the canal bank, underneath the by-weir channel was investigated and sealed. New gates (all manufactured at the British Waterways workshop in Bradley), metalwork and quadrants as per Lock 1 description.

8.0. LOCKS 7 AND 8

LOCK 7

LOCK 8

- Lock 7 and 8 - minor silt and debris removal, minimal brickwork repairs to chamber. New gates, metalwork and quadrants as per lock 1 description.
- All works undertaken by volunteers except for installation of new lock gates.

9.0. JUNCTION CANAL – NEW CUT

- The creation of over 1000m of new cut and construction of 4 new locks, extensive embankments, culverts and the construction of the Gateway Park was included in this section.
- This section was constructed by Morrison Construction.

10.0 JUNCTION CANAL – CANALISATION

- The canalisation of over 500m of the River Salwarpe to create the final link between the Droitwich Canals.
- This section was built by May Gurney.

11.0. CONEY MEADOW REEDBED

- The 5.5 hectare wildlife habitat reedbed was established to provide a safe location for the large quantities of reed habitat displaced when the canal was dredged. In just two years, the site has been transformed into a bustling wildlife habitat supporting a wide range of plants, birds, mammals and insects.
- The reedbed was constructed by Land & Water.

12.0. DREDGING

- Extensive dredging has been undertaken of the 5 miles of the Barge Canal. Healthy reed fringes have been retained to ensure the important wildlife they support continue to thrive.

13.0. GATEWAY PARK AND ACCESS

Gateway Park has been created as the principle point to access the canals. The site has been developed from an old depot site which has been transformed into a park setting featuring adventure play and nature areas, car park and visitor information. A children's explorer trail can also be found in the park featuring ten marker posts situated around the new and old canals.

Access can be found from Hanbury Road close to Droitwich Rugby Club.

14.0. VOLUNTEERS – 3300 VOLUNTEER DAYS IN 3 YEARS.

Barge Lock works (Photo The Waterways Trust)

Barge Lock Opening (Photo Malcolm Nixon)

Npower

Waterway Recovery Group

Stone shaping celebrations

Princes Trust Painting the 'Pamela May' (Photo Andy Pitt)

15.0 CONCLUSION

The Restoration of the Canals has included;

- The careful restoration of 9 broad locks
- Dredging of 5 miles of canal
- Construction of the A449 bridge
- Restoration of other historic structures
- Creation a 5 hectare reedbed at Coney Meadow
- Installation of pontoons
- Installation of interpretation and an audio trail
- 2 canoe pontoons for use by local schools
- 3 otter holts
- owl and bat box installation

The economic benefits of the restoration are;

- £2.75m additional visitor spend
- 196 FTE jobs
- 322,000 additional visitor days plus
- 12,000 p.a. cycling visits
- 2,000 p.a. canoe visits
- 3,500 angling visits
- £3,088,800 uplift values for adj. houses
- £144,000 annual health benefits
- 20% boating increase on W&BC & River Severn
- 3,300 new boat movements
- 87 permanent moorings
- 24 ha of brownfield land regenerated

The partnership would like to thank all those involved in the project in particular the volunteers who have steered the project through almost four decades. Now the partnership driving the scheme is working to ensure those communities who will benefit from the restoration are given the opportunity to play a key part in its development and management.

For further information please go to www.waterscape.com

Volunteer partnerships have been at work along the canal corridor for many years, focusing on sites of natural importance. This is only the start of the new life for the canals and there are still plenty of opportunities to get involved in the volunteer programme. Interested individuals and groups should contact volunteer@britishwaterways.co.uk

Netherwich Basin – A new hub for Droitwich